



"Current" News

Summer/Fall 2013

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Farewell and Hello!

- Best wishes to former MNRR Superintendent, Steve Mietz! Steve is currently the Superintendent at Great Basin National Park in Nevada. Steve Mietz began his new position in Spring 2013.
- Thank you to Steve Thede, Deputy Superintendent at Badlands National Park! Steve is the Interim Superintendent at MNRR and has been a wonderful temporary addition to the staff. Thank you for all the hard work, Steve!

Mobile Ranger Station: Bringing the Park to the People

Missouri National Recreational River is proud to introduce an innovation that will change the way people who live and recreate along the river corridor see the park. The MNRR Mobile Ranger Station is a highly innovative concept that will literally bring the park to the people. The brainchild of Park Ranger Dugan Smith, the Mobile Ranger Station concept developed from a concerted park effort to meet visitors where they are at, all along the river corridor.



*Watch for the Mobile Ranger Station on the road!
Coming soon to an area near you.*

With 126 miles of Wild and Scenic waters, the park's management staff realized there was no way to cover the entire river corridor at one central location such as a visitor center. The solution was to develop a mobile unit that could be a traveling roadshow of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values that make the river unique.

Ranger Smith, who has spent twelve years connecting people to the MNRR says, "This is a real game changer for the park. We are no longer asking visitors to come to us, instead, we are taking a giant step forward out into the community. The mobile ranger station is both an affirmation and a revelation. An affirmation of everything the park stands for today: public outreach, community involvement and a focus on future generations. And by the same token a revelation that this Wild and Scenic River is truly one of our nation's great natural wonders."



*Kids and families enjoying the Mobile Ranger Station
at Yankton's Riverboat Days.*

The exterior is covered with an eye popping graphic wrap that contains strikingly scenic images of Bow Creek Recreation Area and an aerial shot of the mighty Missouri near Goat Island. There is also a colorful map of both park districts. The back door to the trailer contains an invitation transmitted via both words and image to: Come Explore a National Park Near You! The idea is that while the trailer is on the move to special events, schools and river access

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Turning Back the Clock at Bow Creek Recreation Area

Bow Creek Recreation Area at a unique moment in its natural history. The landscape will never look this way again, not even next year. What is here today will change with the seasons, through forces of nature and the choices that stewards of this property make in the future.

The landscape around Bow Creek was already being transformed by Native American use of fire during the pre-exploration period. The natural resources on this property: timber, edible plants and fruit, along with its proximity to the Missouri River made it an inviting place to settle. An Omaha Indian Chief, Little Bow, brought a band of his tribe to the banks of Bow Creek where they built fortifications in the 1790's. By the time William Clark noted "a handsom Plain fronting the river" on August 26, 1804 changes, once only brought about by natural forces, were now increasingly caused by man.

By the mid-1850's, woodcutters harvested timber for steamboats. Land was soon cleared for agricultural purposes as row crops were planted on the rich, river bottomland. Natural processes also continued to leave their mark on the land. Water and sediment moved freely, constantly shaping and reshaping the floodplain. Seasonal spring and summer rises of the Missouri River constantly replenished the bottomland with fresh seed. Cottonwoods continued to sprout from seedlings into whole forests in a couple of generations.

In the 1950's, these natural processes were further altered by dams built along the main stem of the Missouri. Seasonal inundations became a thing of the past. In the space of less than two centuries, the land in and around Bow Creek had gone from wild to relatively natural to alteration by rural development.



Bow Creek, a major Missouri River tributary and the property's namesake, weaves its way through the property and joins the Missouri River. The creek has shifted several times in the past several decades, but has remained a fixture on the local landscape and is a highlight at Bow Creek Recreation Area.

In 2004 the National Park Service acquired the property. Since that time staff from the Missouri National Recreational River have used prescribed fire to maintain and begin to restore a more natural state. Such methods as noxious weed control, cedar clearing and seeding the prairie are helping return cottonwood forest and grasslands once common to this landscape. By doing this, resource managers hope to preserve the traits that make this piece of land a microcosm of the Middle Missouri River.



Park staff evaluate the success of cottonwood cuttings on the sandbar adjacent to the property.

The Bow Creek Recreation Area is now open to the public so they can experience the continuing evolution of this property. Change has been the one constant throughout the natural history of Bow Creek. Today is just another unique moment in the shaping and reshaping of this landscape.

If You Go: Bow Creek Recreation Area is located two miles north of Wynot, Nebraska at the confluence of Bow Creek and the Missouri River. Today the 250 acre floodplain and bluff property stands as a testament to river and landscape change within the dynamic Missouri National Recreational River and provides the public with a unique river experience.

The property is open to public foot traffic. Primitive camping is also allowed. MNRR staff have created a primitive trail system throughout the property which will cover major habitat types, including forest, grassland, wetland, sandbars, along with the confluence of Bow Creek and the Missouri River.



The property is a short drive from Wynot, NE.

Mulberry Bend Overlook: The Past Recaptured

MNRR park staff often like to tell visitors that if they would like to get an idea of what the Missouri River was like during the days of Lewis and Clark they should visit the park's Mulberry Bend Overlook property. It is here at the overlook where visitors can gain expansive views of an ever changing river scape, dotted with sandbars, snags, and riparian forest. It is a dramatic experience, but it also illustrates the difference between the ideal and reality. For the past several years the ideal view has been blocked by the reality of encroachment and growth of invasive species.

While untouched by river processes like erosion and channel migration, the bluff property has seen changes in its plant community. The property has suffered from eastern red cedar (a native, but invasive species) encroachment. The lack of fire and other disturbances have allowed for cedar establishment. Park staff have removed countless eastern red cedars, providing a clearer view of the river below while taking steps toward restoration of the native prairie and oak savannah.

MNRR staff aim to continue maintaining the overlooks scenic vistas by cutting and trimming trees, removing eastern invasive species, controlling noxious weeds, and returning fire to restore the native oak savannah. Because of these efforts the differ-

ence between the ideal and reality is narrowing. Once again the roiling waters of the mighty Missouri are coming into view. This is recreating an ideal visitor experience at the overlook. And that ideal is to see the reality of the power and majesty of the mighty Missouri River. Today a short hike up the path at the Mulberry Bend Overlook is once again well worth the effort!

If You Go: The Overlook, located on the Nebraska (south) side of the Vermillion – Newcastle Bridge, was acquired in 2004 by mitigation procedures when the bridge was built. The 30 acre property is now administered by the National Park Service to preserve and protect the natural qualities of the bluff property while providing an opportunity for the public to view sweeping panoramic vistas of the Missouri River.

The property is open to the public and offers parking as well as a paved path up to two vistas, one of which is wheel chair accessible. The vistas provide expansive views of the Missouri National Recreational River and its corridor as well as interpretive signs and a picnic table.

A primitive trail is being developed to provide a new experience at the overlook. The trail will wind through the native oak forest.



Before cedar removal in 2009 at the Mulberry Bend Overlook. Eastern red cedar dominated the bluff and hindered both the view and native plant success.



After cedar removal in 2009 at the Mulberry Bend Overlook. Removing trees has not only improved the view, but also the native plant community. Restoration will be an ongoing effort.

“Let’s Discover the MNRR”: Teacher Ranger Teachers Travel the MNRR Corridor

By Teacher Ranger Teacher Teresa Mentzer

National Parks are classrooms unto themselves. Visitors to the parks become actively engaged in the lessons that can be learned there; lessons in history, culture, geography, ecology or geology, for example, resonate with each visitor’s experience.



MNRR’s three Teacher-Ranger-Teachers (TRTs) in 2013

Teacher-Ranger-Teachers are educators who partner with the MNRR during the summer break from school. We hail from near and far: Texas, Florida, Nebraska, Illinois and South Dakota. Depending on the needs of the park staff, we assist with interpretive programs, clinics, hikes, surveys and junior ranger programs. Our primary role at the MNRR is to develop programs for community outreach and education in the towns near and along the Missouri River corridor.



Learning and fun at a TRT program.

Our students learn through us the value of National Parks while gaining an understanding of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR), our home for the summer.

Our travels over the last three summers have taken us to libraries and schools in South Dakota and Nebraska with stops in Elk Point, Vermillion, Yankton, Springfield, Tabor, Ponca, Hartington, Crofton, Santee, Niobrara, Verdigre, Lynch and Spencer. Our activities are

usually part of the summer reading program at libraries or school in each town. The young people at every bend are eager to hear about the National Park in their neighborhood and to participate in the lessons and activities we plan for them. In 2013 alone, we reached 390 kids and 92 adults at organized programs throughout the corridor.

The MNRR is our focus. We cover topics relevant to the park such as: endangered and invasive species including the piping plover, pallid sturgeon and Asian carp; key historical and cultural aspects of the area including Lewis and Clark and the Native American heritage; the water cycle and how rivers form; the flora and fauna sustained by the Missouri River watershed; and the vital significance of the natural free-flowing channels of North America’s longest river which our park oversees and protects.



Assembling an NPS arrowhead at a library program, “Let’s Discover the MNRR”.

We thoroughly enjoy representing the MNRR wherever we travel and meeting so many of the park’s neighbors in each community. One thing is quite evident in all of our visits; everyone feels a sense of pride and ownership for the Missouri River. They have special ties to the river and share a common vision of it as a place for everyone to enjoy as well as preserve for generations to come. The children have experienced the river by fishing or boating with families and friends. They are building a relationship with the land and the natural world.

As TRTs we sincerely hope that our lessons convey the important role that youth can play as future stewards of the National Parks in the years ahead.

Interested in a TRT or Ranger-led program? Contact us at (605) 665-0209.

Healthy River, Healthy Park - Keeping the MNRR Clean and Green

What do numerous car bodies, old tractors, a boat lift and tons of tires have in common? No, we are not talking about the contents of a junkyard. Sadly these are just a few of the many items found in and along the Missouri River waterfront close to Yankton during annual river cleanups.

This year the MNRR spearheaded the 10th Anniversary Missouri River Cleanup at Riverside Park in Yankton. Reflecting on the past decade of this event it was time to take stock of what has been accomplished thus far. Through the efforts of dedicated volunteers over

100 tons of trash has been removed from the river close to the Yankton water front. That amount of tonnage is equivalent to the weight of a small commercial airliner! During the first few years of the cleanup tonnage totals were in the double digits. Since then, they have dropped to an average of 4 to 5 tons. What does this tell us? That people all along the riverfront have started to carefully consider what goes into the river.

In 2013 MNRR staff made a strategic decision to expand river cleanups to several notable sites along the park corridor. New cleanups have taken place or will take place at Ponca State Park, Clay County Park

near Vermillion and Niobrara State Park. The reason for this decision was twofold: First and foremost, park staff felt it was critical to perform cleanups in these areas where trash and debris have become a problem. The situation was exacerbated by the 2011



Volunteers work together to transport trash to the waiting boat during the 2013 Missouri River Cleanup.



A boat load of old metal being taken back to shore during a river cleanup.

flood. Secondly, park staff wanted to reach out to river communities in an effort to build a cadre of volunteers who could help keep the river cleaner and greener.



Trash being loaded and properly disposed of at a Yankton-based cleanup.

What MNRR staff discovered, is that folks from the local communities truly care about keeping their local National Park as pristine as possible. These efforts help the MNRR staff carry out one of its mandates under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, to protect the park corridor's water quality. It goes without saying, that removing rusty barrels, pieces of car bodies and other artificial contaminants from the river will dramatically improve the quality of the river's water.

The river serves as a life giving force as the main water supply for communities such as Yankton, Vermillion and Niobrara. It is not enough to ask where these communities would be without the river? We should also ask where these communities would be without a healthy river. The well-being of our communities is intimately connected with the cleanliness of the Mighty Mo's waters. It is another way we are connected with the river and a great reason to take part in a cleanup. Thank you to all of our river cleanup volunteers!

Mobile Ranger Station, cont.

Continued from page 1.

points, passers-by or those waiting in traffic will become aware of the Wild and Scenic River in their backyard that is awaiting discovery.

The interior will contain interpretive display panels, interactive exhibits and multimedia programs that allow visitors to get a more intimate look at the MNRR. Visitors will learn how this mighty river has sculpted not only the landscape, but also the lives of those who have fallen under the spell of its roiling waters. Keep your eyes open and be prepared to follow us as we embark on yet another exciting journey!



MISSOURI NATIONAL RECREATIONAL RIVER

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We're on the Web!

www.nps.gov/mnrr

Find us on Facebook,
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From the Superintendent's Desk

When I arrived as the "Interim" Superintendent at Missouri National Recreational River at the beginning of May, I assumed there must be something special here because it was a National Park Site, but I had no idea what a rare and special place it was. Now I know.

You have a river with a history that looks and behaves much the way it did when Lewis & Clark saw it. You have incredible flowers, trees, fishing and wildlife. You have scenic beauty second to none. You have recreational opportunities to canoe, kayak and explore and a local population that appreciates nature and wants to share the resource with visitors from everywhere.

One of our core American values is that we have decided to set aside the best places in our country "for the people" to visit and enjoy as National Park Sites, and we are all the beneficiaries of those who had the vision and foresight to designate this area as Missouri National Recreational River.

While my time here as the "interim" Superintendent has come to an end, my connection to this place will remain - and I will be back. I invite you to join me in expanding your understanding and appreciation for this place and look forward to benefitting from all the work being done for you by our small but motivated park staff. More inside!

—Steve Thede, Interim Superintendent



Interim Superintendent Steve Thede (center) presents the "Partner of the Year" Award to Tim Cowman, Director of the Missouri River Institute, at the Clay County River Cleanup held in September.